

are you hiding from the truth?

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Relationships:	Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson Philza, Tommyinnit & Toby Smith Tubbo, Clay Dream & TommyInnit, Clay Dream & Technoblade, Ranboo & TommyInnit, Niki Nihachu & Technoblade, Ranboo & Technoblade, its hard to tag but basically theyre all & together, Clay Dream/GeorgeNotFound
Characters:	Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Niki Nihachu , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Alexis Quackity , Floris Fundy , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF) , Grayson Purpled (Video Blogging RPF) , Cara CaptainPuffy , Charlie Dalglish , Slimecicle , Connor ConnorEatsPants , ao3 stop making me use rpf tags challenge
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Hurt/Comfort , Angst , Dark , Mental Health Issues , Trauma , Past Abuse , Depression , Blood and Violence , Past Rape/Non-con , (to both minors and adults but its non-graphic) , Dysfunctional Family , (theyre so dysfunctionalll) , Dead Dove: Do Not Eat , (basically if anything sounds triggering! don't read it thanks!) , Underage Drinking , Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism , Resurrected Wilbur Soot , Winged Wilbur Soot , Piglin Hybrid Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Trans Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Winged Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Winged Niki Nihachu , Enderman-Ghast Hybrid Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Trans Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Winged TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Possessed Clay Dream , Demon Clay Dream (in a way. mwahaha) , sheep hybrid tubbo , so much lore and backstory and detail and- , like the entire cast has chronic pain. this isnt plot relevant i just like it, everything on the other fics also applies here! , specific warnings will be in chapter notes as always , did you order. A Convoluted Story? yes you did. , On Hiatus
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by [hydrangeasheart](#)

Summary

A new arc begins; things get complicated.

(Fic number three in the 'things that grow in the snow' AU! :D)

(ON HIATUS for an unknown amount of time)

Notes

(ranboo voice) hi chat

hello hi! welcome to your irregularly scheduled snow au fic! :D

it's been a long time! wow! well over a year! i'm sorry it's been so long, i've been in a huge rut when it comes to writing and physically not doing too hot, so getting writing done has been hard. but now i'm getting back into it! it's going to be fun, we're getting into stuff i've been super excited to work on and have been having a ton of fun planning! :D so i hope you'll have a good time reading it too! me and my cowriter/friend DeathSquiggles spend so much time talking about this silly au. every day pretty much.

updates will probably be very slow, like my other fics; i have the next couple of chapters started, and several future ones, but work is slow going lol

we'll see how it goes! i hope you can continue to have patience with me! :] and i hope the content makes up for the wait!

warnings for this chapter!:

references to self harm, depression, past sexual assault, and past abuse. generally our normal warnings.

fic title from do you still love me like you used to? by missio, and chapter title from elsa's song by the amazing devil!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

it cannot be a lie if no one hears

Tommy sighs as he folds laundry with mechanical, thoughtless motions. He'd really prefer to be drawing instead, but laundry is *his* chore, and he doesn't mind it much.

Still. He's in the mood to draw. He doesn't know what, but he's in the mood.

He's picked a few of Techno's weirdly pristine irises and peonies and put them in a glass on his desk, and he could practice drawing those... or maybe he'll go outside and see what he can find, what animals he can observe and draw. Probably just the crows... but he has *so* many drawings of the crows. Maybe he'll fly to the village, then.

He sets the laundry aside with another sigh, and he slumps back on the couch. The safety is nice, all the way out here, away from everyone, but he gets so bored with so few people to bother and talk to. It's no one's fault, but the fact remains. He's too social for all this isolation.

That's a depressing train of thought. He should distract himself.

Well, the laundry is all done, so now he can draw.

Tommy gets up, places all the neatly folded laundry in the basket, and carries it to his room. He sets it down on Ranboo's bed, which is currently bare of all blankets and sheets, as is his own.

He gets his sketchbook from his nightstand, and sits down at his desk to draw the flowers he picked. He finds he likes drawing how the iris petals curve, how the peonies curl and spread out. They're very pretty.

He'd never admit it out loud, but he loves flowers. They had so many around the house when he was little, and though he could never help with tending to them beyond pulling weeds, he remembers sitting on the porch and watching Techno and Phil work in the flowerbeds. The flowers had bloomed like crazy under their care and attention-- especially Techno's. Oddly enough, plants seem to thrive when he tends to them.

The door to their bedroom opens, and Ranboo comes through, singing off-key in ender to himself as he goes to make his bed again. (He might not be singing off-key, now that he thinks about it. Maybe that's on-key for ender, no matter how weird it sounds to Tommy's musically-sensitive ears.)

"I'm not putting sheets on your bed for you, by the way," Ranboo calls over while laying out his sheets. "I love you, but not that much."

Tommy snorts and moves to another section of his page, focusing on the irises now, the almost frilled edges of the petals. "Eh, I'll do it later. Before bed, at least."

"Or you'll just make your nest on the floor," Ranboo says, disapproving, making him outright laugh this time. "Don't laugh like you wouldn't do it, you've done it before!"

"That's why it's funny!" He sketches in the stem of the flower, tilting his head for a better angle, even though it doesn't actually do much. "Can you at least do my pillowcases?"

"No, I hate pillowcases." He hears a pillow lamely plop to the floor with a 'flump' sound.

Tommy pushes himself back in his chair and glances over at him, brow raised. He's sitting crosslegged on the edge of his bed, shoving his own pillows into their proper pillowcases. "It's not that hard," he comforts, grinning.

Ranboo looks up, a strand of white hair falling between his eyes. "Then you can do it for yourself, can't you?"

"...it's actually very difficult," he corrects. "Which is why you should do it for me, because you're good at doing difficult things."

"Don't make me throw this at you," he threatens, raising his pillow. "I will, don't try me."

"It won't even hit me. You couldn't throw worth shit even before you lost your depth perception."

"Ah!" Ranboo flops onto his back on the mattress, lazily tossing the pillow to the head of the bed. "I can't believe you would bring that up. You're so mean to me."

Tommy laughs, feeling light, and he turns back to his drawing. He tilts his head again as he sketches in the stem of the iris, the curl of the brownish, budding edges around the base of the flower.

Ranboo works on his bed without much more conversation, instead making ender noises and muttering at the pillows and sheets, clearly scolding them for not cooperating with him. It's very endearing, but Tommy thinks all of his noises are endearing. They're close enough to avian sounds that some part of him softens whenever he hears them, and they feel safe, somehow.

He thinks it's interesting, how he sees Ranboo in the same light he used to see his older brothers in.

He used to think Techno's crooked smile and tendency to fidget with his hands and hair was charming, and he thought how Wilbur avoided looking at people when he was embarrassed and his habit of drumming idle rhythms on any flat surface he was near just the same. In all honesty, he still thinks all those things, but it's different now.

But his feelings towards Ranboo are just the same. Maybe it's just... how he feels, when he loves someone. He sighs happily at the idea.

"Tommy?"

He jolts, surprised, not expecting the sound of his voice. "Yeah?"

Ranboo hesitates for a moment, before continuing. "How are you feeling?"

Tommy turns around slightly in his chair, looking at him with his brows furrowed. "I'm... I'm okay," he says, somewhat hesitant. "Why do you ask?"

Ranboo picks idly at the plush enderman on his lap. "I dunno. You've been having more nightmares and stuff, and- well..." he trails off. His good eye is darting around on the floor below his feet, though the white, blinded one doesn't move much.

"I'm just worried," he finally says. "With all the stuff that's happened, like with Wilbur and all..."

Tommy flinches slightly at the reminder. "Right," he says, shaking his head. "Like I said, I think I'm okay. M-mostly okay."

It's not *entirely* a lie.

He *is* okay.

He's nervous and edgy and overly emotional. He hasn't asked for the knife Techno gave him back, and he makes sure his scythe is kept out of their room.

(He's started praying again, but it just makes him angry now. It's made him angry ever since he was exiled.)

(One night, after Dream had been particularly cruel, Tommy had gotten so angry, felt so hurt and so abandoned, that he ripped off the cross necklace he'd worn since he was twelve and threw it into the ocean with a scream that turned into a sob. It never washed up on the beach after that.)

But he's okay. He's fine. He scratches at the bandages plastered on his inner wrist.

"I'm going to believe you, that you're feeling okay," Ranboo starts, lacing his hands together on his lap. "But if you need to talk about something, I'll listen." There's a shy smile on his face, turning up the corners of his mouth.

Tommy returns the smile. "Thanks." The reminder is sweet, and he lets it sit in his mind, to melt like candy and stick in place as something real.

-

Tommy crosses his legs to rest his sketchbook on his lap, jiggling a dark red pencil between his fingers.

He's pretty much drawn everything in the whole house. He even went upstairs and sketched the whole loft space. He's drawn every person here, and the cats, and Techno's horse, and the crows, and...

Well. He hasn't drawn *everyone*. There's a pretty significant person missing from his collection of family drawings.

He looks up through the loose strands of his hair.

Wilbur is sitting by the fire, preening, occasionally pausing to tease one of the cats with a loose feather. It's such a *normal* thing for him to do, and it makes Tommy feel some... *complicated* emotions.

He looks like his older brother again, like that.

Taking care of his wings, smiling, humming softly to himself. The fire behind him lights up the edges of his wings and his hair, making him look almost angelic.

The firelight compliments him, making him look softer. It rounds out all of his sharp edges.

Wilbur, sitting next to a campfire in that awful ravine, orange light catching in his eyes and warping until it's almost red.

Wilbur, flicking ash off a cigarette, the hollows under his eyes deep and dark.

Wilbur with no wings. With no softness at all.

*Wilbur with no **wings** --*

It's like he's been kicked in the chest. He hasn't, of course, but the emotion he feels is intense and painful.

Tommy turns his eyes back to his sketchbook and blinks hard to banish painful tears. He's not going to cry. He's *not*.

(The long wounds on Wilbur's back didn't heal with respawn. They were ugly things, uneven, messy. His wings had been cut off just at his back, catching his skin as well and ripping it away.

No one knew what to do about it.

Niki washed the wounds and bandaged them well, but they didn't have any potions or medicine on hand. They were all out.

She taught Tommy how to tend to the wounds. He did it diligently, being as careful as possible, even though the sight of Wilbur's damaged back and the often-bloodied feathers there made him feel sick to his stomach.

He couldn't imagine losing his wings like that. It would crush him, destroy him entirely. He's sure he'd never recover emotionally.

He doesn't know if Wilbur *has* recovered emotionally from it.

Wilbur was very subdued while he was stuck in bed. He spent several days laying on his stomach on a cot, not talking much. He didn't sleep much either, but he hovered in some tired, weak twilight.

It took two weeks for the wounds to heal enough for him to sit up for more than a few minutes. Even then, he wasn't even close to being better.

He couldn't walk without a cane, the lack of his wings ruining his balance. He was in pain often, which probably didn't help his crumbling mental state.

He doesn't remember who said it, but someone commented on how sickly and thin Wilbur looked without his wings. He had grimaced and looked away at first, before anger filled his expression.

His response was to punch whoever it was in the face.

It was one of the few times back then where Tommy could laugh.)

Tommy scrubs at his eyes with his sweater sleeve. He's not *going* to cry. There's no *reason* to cry.

He's just remembering something.

He goes back to sketching. He decides to draw the bookshelf, because he's sitting in a different place than last time, so he can get a different perspective.

He's drawn more over the last little while than he has in years. He's already shortened his colored pencils significantly, and over half of the thick sketchbook Niki got him for his birthday is filled up.

He thinks it helps. He doesn't feel as bad, when he's creating something, doing *something* with his hands. Techno's been letting him help with any sewing that needs to be done, too.

And his art has gotten better. Ranboo has been a willing model, even when it meant sitting next to Tommy and holding his hands very still while he drew them, studying what they look like.

Tommy glances up to look at the bookshelf and then jolts, because Wilbur is right in front of him, mouth open to speak, a hand raised. He looks surprised as well.

"...Yeah?" Tommy prompts, bringing his sketchbook to his chest protectively. "What do you want?"

Wilbur seems to try to smile, but he looks distinctly uncomfortable. "I... it's nothing," he says awkwardly. "I was going to ask you what you were drawing, but..." He moves back a step. "Nevermind."

"...Right," Tommy says, slowly adjusting his sketchbook again. He starts drawing once more, but Wilbur still hovers uncertainly near him, standing right in front of what he's trying to look at.

He gives a small sigh. "I'm drawing the bookshelf," he says, gesturing at it. "Could you step aside, so I can s-see it?"

"Oh! Oh, yeah, I'm sorry." Looking awkward, as if he's made some sort of blunder and he knows it, Wilbur walks over to the fireplace again, and sits down on the rug.

That's... *new* . The hesitation, the awkwardness, the *apology* ?

What is up with him?

-

The world is rendered in hazy shades of red and black. Everything hurts and someone is crying (*maybe it's him?*) and he can't move.

Big, sharp-nailed hands are wrapped around his throat, tight as a chain and incredibly cold, digging into his skin. The claws cut into him, cutting him deeper than should be possible. Blood runs down his neck and soaks into his hair, splayed under his head.

His head tips back onto the pillow and a high, horrible squeal leaves him. The hands curl tighter and he can't breathe.

Stop stop stop stop , he wants to scream, tearing its way out of his aching throat. *Let go of me please let go this hurts stop stop stop--*

"Pretty," whispers a familiar-unfamiliar voice, sweet and poisonous. It's like something boring through his skin to eat into his soft insides.

-

Techno wakes up gasping for breath.

He's unable to move, pinned on his back in his own bed.

He can still feel the hands around his throat.

Let go of me , he begs desperately, but his lips won't move. *Let go.*

Somewhere in his mind, he knows it isn't real. It's just sleep paralysis, or something similar. It'll go away, it *always* does. He *knows* what this is.

That doesn't stop him from being fucking *terrified* .

He can't close his eyes. There are hands around his throat (not really, they're not really there, *it's not real, you know the difference between reality and hallucinations goddammit--*) and he can't close his eyes and he's scared and he wants it to stop happening.

This happens *almost every night*.

Stop panicking , he tells himself, *take a deep breath, it's fine. You're safe, it's safe here. Completely safe.*

He tries his best to draw in a shaky breath. He can't move, but he can take stock of his surroundings, his situation, what he's physically feeling.

His blankets are laid over him, heavy and warm. His shirt is all twisted around his torso, exposing most of his stomach under the blankets. His arm is still cradling Marnie close, her soft, worn fleece a comforting sensation on bare skin.

He can hear Phil murmuring in his sleep, making small bird noises, breathing evenly.

That's soothing. He's not alone. Hearing his father asleep near him is about as comforting as it can get. It soothed him when he was a scared little kid who had nightmares every night, and it soothes him now, as a scared adult who... has nightmares... every night...

(He's really not changed much in that time. He might be bigger and stronger and smarter than he was as a kid, but really, not a lot has changed. Especially lately. The scared little seven year old he used to be would recognize him immediately, even though he's grown up so much.)

It takes a while for the hands to melt away from his throat. He feels like they slide down his shoulders and over his chest and then disappear, finally leaving him alone.

Techno breathes in slowly, holds it for a few seconds, and then exhales. He curls his hands in the soft things around him, grounding himself.

The horror is over, for now. It was a memory, a nightmare, but it can't hurt him now. He's *safe*.

He kicks his blankets away, the chill in the air soothing to his hot, frightened body. The wooden floor is cold under his socked feet when he puts them down.

He pulls his journal from his bedside table and turns on the light. It's not too bright, just barely enough to write by.

He puts his glasses on and flips to a blank page.

I had the same nightmare tonight. Just the hands, choking me...

Maybe I should just be grateful that it's not more detailed. That was more than-

Phil snores quietly, but the noise is still sudden enough that it makes Techno jump and turn sharply to look at him. He's trembling.

But he's just a lump of blankets and feathers in his nest, completely asleep.

Techno exhales shakily.

He's not awake.

(He doesn't want to talk about it. Not with him, not with *anyone*. And that's something—that he can't share his feelings at *all*. So much for getting better, for becoming more open.)

He goes back to his diary.

Maybe I should just be grateful that it's not more detailed. That was more than awful, but they've stopped for now.

Now, it's just the vague dreams.

The hands, mostly. Or the black room with his voice echoing around me. Or...

I've never had sleep paralysis before this. It's not a nice experience. Could've gone the rest of my life without knowing how it feels...

He taps his pen against the paper, leaving little black ink spots. Most of the last few entries are similar to this one. Recounting his nightmares and how he's been feeling.

There are some snippets of writing too, not just journaling. Like a half-finished poem about Dream, with the majority of it being crossed out furiously.

He likes to think it helps, putting his experiences into words. He's not sure if it really does, but at least it's out of his head.

Will I stop having nightmares soon? Or at least go back to the normal ones? I'd rather have the one about wandering through an endless fortress. At least that one is familiar and predictable...

How could he do this to me? Not once, but twice?? ~~I trusted him so much, I thought we were friends, I thought he cared about me. I hate that I still care about him. I hate that part of me still feels so soft towards him. He hurt me, he hurt my family. He doesn't deserve my love. I should know better than to miss him.~~

~~I miss him a lot.~~

He crosses out a good portion of a lot of his entries.

He sighs, takes his glasses off, and rubs the bridge of his nose. It's way too early to be awake, even for him. It's barely dawn, and he only slept a few hours that night... and his *head* hurts.

He closes his journal, sets it on his nightstand, and lays his pen on top. He turns out the light.

He curls up on his side in bed, buried under his weighted blanket, and hugs Marnie against his chest. *At least you can't hurt me*, he thinks childishly, pressing his face to the top of her soft head. *More friends should be like you. Harmless and soft.*

Marnie, as usual, doesn't respond to his internal monologue.

He used to imagine she did, though. When he was twelve and starting to get embarrassed by the idea of going to his dad after every nightmare, he would lay with a much less worn out Marnie and think all of his worries to her. He would fidget with her soft ears and think about the nightmare, playing out a whole conversation with the plush pig in his arms.

He didn't only think like that about nightmares, either; he was a friendless, shy child, and the imaginary friend that the plush represented filled that void.

In a way, she was his first friend.

(*I don't know if I like him* , Techno thought to the plush sitting next to him. *He's so loud. And he annoys me.*

You think everyone is loud and annoying, Marnie replied. In his head, she sounded very much like a piglin, her voice rough and deep.

That's true, I guess. Everyone is too noisy for me. He rolled onto his back, holding Marnie in the air above him. *What do you think, should I talk to him more if he shows up tomorrow?*

I think you should. It would be nice for you to have more friends. Then you wouldn't have to talk to a plush.

What if I want to talk to a plush? He brought her against his chest and hugged her securely, protectively. *You're my best friend.*

He never told anyone about how vividly he imagined his plush's voice, her personality.

He was keenly aware that it would draw mockery from other kids, and maybe even worry from adults. Imagination was a good thing, but only if it didn't go too far, and making up detailed personalities for your plushes when you're nearly thirteen was *too far*.

Wilbur would have *never* let him live it down.)

He fiddles with the soft edge of his blanket, unable to close his eyes.

Fear has settled firmly inside of him, curling up in his chest, heavy and cold like snowfall. Every shift of light outside, or clouds passing over the moon, or monsters making noise outside, or someone *in the house* making noise, it all makes him flinch.

He's tired of being anxious and afraid all the time. He's supposed to be braver than this. His younger self would laugh at him, seeing how nervous he is. Jumping at shadows...

(Maybe not. He jumped at shadows back then, too.)

He hears a spider hiss outside. The hoot of an owl. A crow cawing.

The frame of Phil's bed creaks, and he makes a sound that might be the beginning of a word. Feeling incredibly young and scared, Techno burrows below his covers and tries very hard to seem like he's asleep.

After a few moments, Phil sighs and then begins to softly snore again. When Techno peeks over the top of his blanket, he's sprawled out on his stomach, not moving save for the subtle rise and fall of his back as he breathes and the occasional twitches of his wings.

Techno lets out a sigh. Good.

It's good that he's still asleep. If he was awake, and asked him why *he's* awake, he wouldn't be able to stop himself from saying why. He just wouldn't; he'd babble about the reason like the scared creature he is.

He turns onto his back and stares at the blurry, dark ceiling.

He can't tell anyone about this. And he doesn't want to, does he? Telling someone would just make them feel bad, because he made a sacrifice for them. One of the ultimate sacrifices.

(He *does* want to tell someone, in some quiet, isolated part of him. A part of him that resents his own distrustful, secretive nature, even with those he loves most. That isolated part of him simply *begs* for him to tell someone.

Instead, he vows to write more, come morning. He'll write more and he'll pretend it makes the feeling go away.)

-

Everything tastes like guilt.

For Phil, guilt tastes like something bittersweet. It coats his every interaction like medicine, like something he'll have to choke down.

"I believe that you would do pretty much anything for him. Because he's your favorite."

He's pacing lines in the snow. There's a crow following him on the ground, hopping along in apparent glee. They never seem to mind it when he's in a bad mood.

He wants to run away. He wants to take flight, run away, disappear and never be seen again.

"You're fucking stupid," he mutters to himself, rubbing at his neck to ease out the soreness.

His kids *need* him here. They're so damaged, and they need *someone* to support them.

It would be *so* easy to just fly away, though.

He sighs and shakes his head. It's never going to be easy, and he knows it, but he's made his own bed and he must lay in it.

He *does* need to fly, though. Just a short flight won't hurt. Being in the air will clear his head a little, let him think a little more coherently.

With a sharp motion, he extends his wings, sending up curling drafts of snow, and takes off.

His body immediately feels better once he's off the ground. The wind blows his hair back from his face and nearly upsets his hat, but he doesn't care. It feels too good.

The air is cold and crisp. It filters through his feathers soothingly, smothering the fire of guilt in his chest. For a minute, he can breathe without trouble, no painful guilt or sadness in the way.

It doesn't last. He stays close to the house, watching the ground below. He can see Techno cutting firewood, and Tommy standing nearby, likely playfully annoying him. Ranboo is outside as well, sitting on the porch railing and staring into space.

Wilbur is still inside.

Phil sighs, raising a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose.

Fucking... *Wilbur* .

His eldest is a... *problem* , right now.

He's trying to apologize. To atone. To be a better man. Phil knows he's *trying*, and he already forgives him.

No one else seems to share the sentiment, other than Niki. Tommy and Ranboo are noticeably anxious around him, all twitching wings and flicking tail. Techno rarely speaks to him directly, and when he does, Phil can almost taste the distrust in his voice.

Niki is polite and kind to Wilbur, but she's also very firm. She won't let him give up, even if she has to use threats.

It seems to be working, at least. Wilbur has been on his best behavior for the last week.

It'll take longer than that for him to make up for what he's done. If it's even possible.

Of course, he'd never tell him his doubts. But the doubts *are* there, regardless.

He sighs again. He should land, shouldn't he?

Maybe after a few more minutes. Flying clears his head, makes him that much more stable for a little while.

And they all need that stability.

He flies in a wide circle, turning in the cold air, letting it soothe his woes. It's the case for most avians, but flying has always been a very calming experience for him.

He spent a lot of time flying alone, when he was much younger. He learned how to fly earlier than most kids-- he was around four or five, and most don't pick it up until six or later-- and he did it every day, for long stretches of time.

It was a bit troublesome when he was a teenager. Flying burns energy like nothing else, and he was always hungry anyway, because he was still growing.

He smiles a bit at the memory of his younger self, with his too-big wings that dwarfed the rest of him and blonde hair cropped short and thick glasses.

He turns once more in the air, looking up at the sky. It's late afternoon, the daylight is fading, and the darkening of the clouds hints at a storm. That's often the case, here.

He should probably get inside before that happens. Flying in a storm is a mistake you only make once.

He begins to descend, when he sees... *something* in front of him. A humanoid shape, all darkness and shadow, appears in his path.

He can't stop in time. He shouts in alarm, expecting to crash right into whatever it is, but he goes *through* it.

He gained too much momentum, and that leads to him crashing into a snowbank, head first.

He pushes himself to sit up, caked in snow. Well, at least he's dressed for it.

He blows a strand of snow-clotted hair out of his face and retrieves his hat from the crater his body made in the snow.

He looks up at the sky, trying to find whatever he nearly collided with. But there's nothing. Just overcast grey.

He narrows his eyes.

Was there actually anything there? Or did he just imagine it?

He's heard of darkness making you see things that aren't there, but he supposes it could happen in daylight too. Or maybe the light reflecting off the snow was playing tricks on his eyes...?

He gets up from the snow, shaking it off his wings. He's landed close to home, close enough to hear the chop of an axe through wood and the impression of voices.

He needs to get inside and into dry, warm clothes, before he gets hypothermia. That would be a disappointing way to go out, after all this time.

He starts walking, shivering slightly, pulling his coat tight to his body. He mostly watches his feet-- there's a frozen-over pond near where he is, and he's keeping an eye out for it.

But when he does look up, he sees that thing again. The shadow.

It's standing against a snowbank to his left, clear as day. It can't be more than ten feet from him.

He can't discern any features, just the vague shape of a person-- he might see wings, too--

Phil blinks, shaking his head a little.

The figure is gone.

"I'm finally losing it," he says aloud.

A young-looking crow swoops down in front of him, dark feathers stark and shiny in the winter sun against all the white snow. It caws at him, clearly wanting his attention.

Crows have always been awfully fond of him. He can't tell if he just settles in places they like, or if they follow him.

Phil reaches down and allows the bird to hop onto his arm. He brings it up to his eye level, and it makes happy cawing noises, which he returns, though with a bit less enthusiasm.

It affectionately nips at his ear, before settling itself on his shoulder.

"Did you see that?" He asks quietly. "Is there someone else out here?"

The crow is quiet for a few minutes, but he knows he'll get some kind of answer. No matter what language he speaks, the crows seem to understand it. Perks of his species, he supposes.

He starts walking again, bringing the bird with. He's getting very cold, so he tries to hurry. The cabin is in sight.

The crow nips at him again, before making an undeniably negative sound, almost like a human cry. It gives him the shivers.

"You didn't see anything?" Another negative sound. He sighs. "Alright. Maybe I *am* just going crazy... Wouldn't shock me, at this point." He laughs half-heartedly, raising a hand to rub his brow.

He has a headache, but it's rare that he doesn't lately. Stress has always given him headaches, and they got markedly worse when he came back from the End. At least the vertigo isn't as bad as it used to be.

He makes it back to the cabin. The crow caws and takes off from his shoulder, perching on the porch by Ranboo. Ranboo chirps in ender at it and watches it next to him with clear curiosity.

Phil's arrival brings Techno's attention. He pauses with his wood axe raised, and his brows follow. "Did you land wrong or somethin'?" He asks, frowning. "You're gonna catch your death, covered in snow like that."

He tries to brush snow off his cloak. "Do you think I don't know that?" he asks, only mildly annoyed. "I'm on my way inside, don't worry."

"Put on dry clothes and stay near the fire," Techno says with slightly infuriating concern. "You get too cold even faster than I do."

"Yeah, yeah." Phil waves a hand dismissively and climbs the stairs. "You don't need to fuss over me, mate. I'm an adult, I can take care of myself."

"Someone has to do it," Techno says gravely. He doesn't like the implication, so he goes inside without answering.

Dream washes the soap and dirt from his hair under the cold spray of his shower, scrubbing himself clean, trying to force himself not to think about anything.

Focus on the shower. On the cold of the water and the feeling of the soap and the sound of your movements and the water hitting the floor.

He manages to make it through the shower mostly okay. He gets out and dries off, then dresses without looking at himself in the mirror. It's only once his body is covered that he looks at his reflection. He hates seeing his weird, battered, *adult* body in the glass.

With clothes on, though, he looks mostly like himself. Those are still his eyes, and his freckles, and his nose. He forces himself to smile, and that's still *his* smile, if he avoids paying attention to his teeth too much.

As he observes himself in the mirror, he sighs. He doesn't know why he's here. In general, but especially right now. The demon just... disappeared, and he's in control.

Whatever.

He forces another smile, before sighing.

He needs to ask the guardian some questions.

He murmurs the spell to himself, unable to forget it. It's not in any language he's ever known before, but it burnt itself into his memory from the first time he heard it.

He says it aloud, now, while meeting his own eyes.

But the usual waving of the image in the glass, his face warping into a vision of the past... just *doesn't happen*.

He repeats the incantation, but nothing happens.

Dream narrows his eyes at his reflection and finds himself crossing his arms in annoyance, in almost the exact same way he'd do it when his brothers wouldn't listen to him. The memory makes him scowl.

"XD?" he asks, raising his voice, as if that will help. "I'm the *only one* who can summon you, so where are you...?"

Everything is as it should be, for communicating with the server guardian. He's alone, he's said the spell, and he's looking in the mirror.

Not all servers have a server guardian, but most do. It's too intense for most people, to be directly connected to the magic and mechanics of a server. Dream is one of those people.

And besides, demons can't be in control of servers. They learned that.

("It's not *working*," The demon said through his body, more genuinely distressed than Dream has ever heard it. "Why isn't it *listening* to me?")

Dream could see the guardian standing across from him, idly looking at his nails. From head to toe, even in a white robe and sandals, he looked painfully like Dream, age sixteen. The same age he still feels.

The only differences were his eyes-- a glowy, almost golden shade-- and an X-shaped scar over the bridge of his nose and his cheeks.

“Maybe because it’s not you?” he offered, amused by the demon's frustration.

“Shut up. I *am* you, so it should listen to me.”

“I have a name, you know,” The guardian said, his face creasing with annoyance. Dream could’ve howled with laughter at how familiar it was. “Call me XD, please.”

“You don’t need a name. You’re not a person.”

“Well, you’re not a person either,” XD pointed out with a grin. “If you want me to listen to you, maybe you should be nicer.”

“Ugh.”)

Dream tries the spell two more times. Nothing happens, not even a whisper of change.

He sighs and turns away from the mirror. If XD won’t listen to him right now, he’ll just... enjoy being in control, he supposes.

He leaves the bathroom, which leads into his little bedroom. He thinks he has books, somewhere? Something to read... the idea of having something physical to interact with, to read, to hold in his hands, sounds nice.

He looks up from the smooth stone below his socked feet--

--*Ranboo is sitting on his bed.*

He’s sitting. On *his* bed. Just sitting there politely, hands folded on his lap, feet on the floor below the side of the bed. Staring at his feet, with his eyes glowing a bizarre purple behind his long black-and-white hair.

Dream opens his mouth to say something, but he’s not sure what he *should* say.

Why is he here? How did he get here? Why is he sitting on my bed?

Why is he on my bed?

“Ranboo?” Dream asks hesitantly. He doesn’t respond; instead, he just continues staring down at the floor. Ender particles float around his face and shoulders. “Why are you here?” Again, no response.

He steps forward, closer to the bed, until he’s in front of him. With a careful hand, he reaches out, and rests it on top of Ranboo’s fluffy head, between his short horns.

He doesn't speak, but he does let out a little scrap of noise, a sort of short, almost insect-like chirping sound. He leans into Dream's hand, seeking the touch.

Well... he's *dressed*, at least? Nothing too bad could have happened, if he's still dressed. Right. And he doesn't look hurt, either, which is good. He's going to pretend to believe that everything's fine here.

Dream sighs and runs a hand through his awry, damp hair. "Why?" He asks, referring to the general situation.

He doesn't get a response, of course; Ranboo is in some sort of trance, completely dead to the world. It's undoubtedly because of something his malicious passenger did, but he can't even guess what it could have done.

But, regardless of what it is... Ranboo can't just *stay* here.

"I need to take you home," Dream says. "I wonder..."

He reaches in and grabs Ranboo's wrist, gently pulling him up from his position on the edge of the bed. He stands up easily enough, on steady legs. Even when Dream lets go of his wrist, he stays standing.

"Huh," Dream says. He takes Ranboo's hand now, and takes a few steps while tugging him along.

He follows.

Well. At least he can get him moving.

-

Dream brushes some hanging branches out of the way and ducks under them, leading Ranboo with him.

Cold wind blows through the spruce trees, making them rustle with a sound like cracking ice. He shoves his free hand into his pocket to protect his fingers.

The ground is scattered with leaves and spruce needles and snow, mostly piled up around the bottom of the tree trunks. Other than the rustle of the trees, it's very quiet.

Dream shivers for a reason unrelated to the cold wind. Ranboo chirps in response to the cold. His cheeks and nose and the tips of his ears are all flushed from the wind, but he seems otherwise unaware of the temperature. His eyes are still vacant and glowing.

"C'mon," Dream says, tugging on his hand. "Let's go."

They keep walking. It's getting snowier and colder, and Dream is starting to seriously regret his lack of a proper coat.

Ranboo is dressed for the cold, though, in thick clothes and sturdy boots and a warm-looking cloak with a collar and hood lined with very soft fur. He thinks it's rabbit fur, judging by how it looks and feels, and it's quite nice. The muted blue fabric of the cloak proper is embroidered with pretty golden flowers and swirls. (He thinks he knows what hands stitched them, but he refuses to think too much about it.)

Dream pulls his hood up and tightens the drawstrings slightly.

"Why are you like this, anyway?" He asks Ranboo's unresponsive body, as they walk. "You're in some sort of trance or something. You're not really *sleepwalking* though, I don't think..." He trails off with a sigh. "I don't get what's going on... I *never* know."

They start coming up on some signs of life. Evidence of footprints in the snow, a trail of smoke in the sky, some broken arrows scattered aside under a tree, probably from hunting.

"Where should we be going?" Dream asks himself. "We should be getting close, right? This feels familiar..."

After a few more minutes, he starts hearing the sound of voices in the distance. Someone laughs loudly.

Ranboo makes a noise, almost in response to the laughter. He steps forward, stumbling a little. There's a little bit of awareness in his eyes. He blinks hard.

"C'mon, let's get you over there." Dream tugs him along, following the voices, despite his fear of being seen by the people who must be speaking.

Ranboo follows, still obedient. It makes something in Dream's stomach twist uncomfortably when he thinks about how that obedience would delight his *unpleasant passenger*.

But they go, crunching along the snow at each other's sides. There's more laughter, familiar laughter, laughter he knows.

He hears *Techno's* laughter. Bright and loud and almost a cackle, in the way he used to laugh when Dream would make a really awful joke that appealed to him perfectly. *Shut up, you're not funny*, he would say through his laughter, probably shoving Dream or hitting his arm lightly.

Loneliness and longing and *loss* curl in Dream's chest. He misses having Techno as a friend. As a close, dear friend.

As they draw closer, he can see the cabin, looking cozy and comfortable and so... *nice*. Techno is outside, sitting on the porch, laughing loudly at Niki, who's telling a story eagerly. Dream is surprised that he seems so calm, but maybe he thinks Ranboo just left on his own. Maybe he did. It's not like he knows how Ranboo ended up in his house. (It can't be good, though.)

Dream leads Ranboo to the trees near the cabin and gently nudges him to pass them on his own. "Go on," he says, like he's encouraging a pet to leave the house for the first time.

Ranboo stumbles forward, almost falling over his own feet, but he wanders forward enough to escape the trees and approach the cabin.

Niki sees him first-- her eyesight is probably better than Techno's, he's very nearsighted and he's not wearing his glasses-- and her eyes grow wide with excited joy. "Ranboo!" She calls, jumping off the porch railing and fluttering her wings as she half-runs, half-flies to the boy's side. "You're back! It's been over a day, we were so worried!"

Ranboo doesn't respond, not even when Niki takes his hand and leads him back to the porch. Techno immediately begins to fuss over Ranboo, looking him over, checking him for wounds, frowning.

Dream watches from the trees. He feels so lonely, looking at the three of them. Lonely and lost and... somehow guilty.

"We were really worried about you," Niki says, looking at Ranboo with concern in her large blue eyes. "I'm glad we were out here when you came back!"

Ranboo still doesn't talk, but he seems more aware. He makes little ender noises as he's checked over and worried about, blinking slowly and dazedly as he's led inside the house, where it's warm and safe and--

Safe. It's *safe* . It's safe inside, away from Dream.

Dream sighs and leans back on a tree, briefly observing the outside of the warmly-lit cabin.

You could go in there right now and take care of your end of our deal, the demon says suddenly, its voice mild. **It wouldn't be too hard. He's probably off guard right now, fussing over our little doll. You could do it.**

"I don't think that's a smart idea," Dream replies, softly. "He'd probably be even more aggressive, because he's worried. I know him better than you do."

I suppose. You know, I can tell you're stalling.

"At least we're on the same page." Dream pushes away from the tree and turns to start walking home. "I'll do it when I'm ready. You can be patient."

Don't let me get too hungry, Dream. Everyone else is in danger more and more the longer you wait.

Dream bites his tongue.

not a chapter (sorry) but a important update from your author

Chapter Notes

been workshopping this little update for a bit now, sorry for the stupid long hiatus and how much longer it might be. hope this sheds some light on stuff

hi guys! dove here. been a while, i know. oops. this series is over 3 years old now, wow! this baby's getting closer to being a kid. or something.

i'm not going to bore you with a sob story, but the long and short of it is things have been real rough for me for several months and it doesn't show many signs of stopping. that impacts a lot of my life, but most pressingly here is my writing. ive been majorly writer's blocked on this series for ages now, and it's leading to me hating everything i create for it, which is. not fun nor great!! ive been trying so hard but it is just. not in the cards for me to work on this seriously rn.

along with that, the news regarding wilbur soot being an abusive POS to several people, including shubble/shelby, has really shaken me up as an abuse victim myself, and idk when im going to be comfortable writing his character again.

like cwilbur of all forms is just our collective oc, we know this, but it still feels upsetting and gross to work with his character for the time being, especially considering where ive been planning on taking his arc. (snow wil's arc involves him redeeming himself after being abusive to those he loved most.... 🤔 feels a little rough now)

i have a feeling this will change with time, it's just still very fresh and hurtful for me rn.

so! this series is officially on a hiatus. i know it's been on an unofficial one for quite a while now, but i wanted to let people who have been waiting for an update know that i haven't abandoned this, and i hope to one day finish it, because i am still so fucking proud of it and all the love it's been given, but right now just isn't the time. hopefully sooner rather than later, i can come back stronger and enjoy writing again.

just know that anything that happens in my fics is not reflective of how i actually feel about any ccs, and these little guys are basically my ocs with a dsmp coat of paint at this point lol.

i don't know where exactly the fic will go from here- whether i'll do some rewriting, totally rework snow au wilbur as a character, whatever. but it will return eventually! i have some ideas for what i might change.

(kind of a tangent, but ive been wanting to rewrite parts of this series for actual years now, since ive developed the world and story so much more and come up with more ideas and ways to rework certain relationships. so maybe this is a blessing in disguise??? idk. we'll see.)

i'm sorry this isn't a real chapter update, i truly wish it was, but shit sucks sometimes and you gotta just know when to throw in the towel for a while. i'll be back on the field soon. or whatever sports metaphor i was gonna use idk

thanks for sticking around and reading these silly little fics, it's been a blast and i hope we can keep doing that soon enough :> and if it takes a while, i hope you can continue to be patient with me. sometimes i am dealt a rough hand by life and i need time.

ive changed a lot since i started writing this au. it was originally the product of a christmas eve full of wine and exile arc content, and it has become the creative work ive been most dedicated to for a long time.

even if my motivation has waned and my situation has changed a lot since the beginning, im still so proud of it and the love it's been given and everything. this sounds dumb and sappy but my life would not be where it is today without this silly little au about block game men. so thanks for sticking around.

love you gamers o7  stay safe out there

- dove hydrangeasheart

(also im still locked out of my tumblr because staff is incompetent and hasn't helped me with a simple issue after months and several attempts to contact support. but we all knew they suck lol. sorry if you've been trying to get in touch with me, ive been unable to get into it since august :c which means my url is still a wilbur reference augh)

edit: can't believe i have to say this, but don't talk about how this situation is "ironic" considering the fact that i have written some dark fanfiction with evil/dark characters, what the fuck.

End Notes

thank you for reading! i deeply appreciate it! <3

follow me on tumblr @illputdownmyrootswhenimdead!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!